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Significance of Devolution in Kenya

Abstract

Kenya’s devolution, as enshrined in the 2010 constitution, sought to decentralize powers from the national government to designated regional governments in the form of counties, and smaller local authorities. It was driven by the desire of Kenyan citizens to have government services brought closer to them. It is clearly explained in articles 174 and 175 of the constitution, which lays a foundation for diversity and democracy, enabling local communities to be in charge of their affairs and governance.

History of devolution in Kenya

Devolution in Kenya was introduced by the 2010 constitution that was promulgated on August 27, 2010, following a referendum where Kenyans chose the new constitution over the older one. This created a decentralized form of governance that was intended to bring services closer to the people, leading to the establishment of the 47 counties that are currently in operation in Kenya.

The county governments became fully operational after the 2013 national elections, with Article 174 of the constitution recognizing the right of local communities to preside over their local affairs. The decentralized form of government helps promote the democratic and accountable exercise of power by the elected leaders.

Significance of devolution

The significance of devolution lies in its potential to address the nation’s perennial challenges such as national cohesion, and public participation among other issues. National unity has been promoted by the lowering of power from national, inaccessible national governments closer to the people, fostering a sense of unity among them. Hope (2014) adds that it is necessary to have a local democracy if national unity is to be developed in a country where there is great local diversity and unlikeness. Hope further adds that the ability of devolution to promote unity and stability is among the main reasons why more Kenyans preferred it over the older constitution. Ambrose (2017) warns that feelings of inequality among the people, as a result of the old centralized national government, had developed and were being addressed by the devolution of powers (Hope, 2014).

Improved public participation

County governments have encouraged locals to participate more in development projects and discussions since their views are being considered in their county developments. A report by AFIDEP (2016) showed that policymakers in the Kenyan health sector have prioritized public participation in their decision-making processes (AFIDEP, 2016).

The Parliamentary Service Commission identifies guidelines for use in policy making and public participation in which it identifies three major factors that influence decision-making in the country. It noted that decisions made at the county level of government usually affect the local needs of the people, and involve meaningful discussion at the grassroots level on how they can best manage the affairs of the county (Parliamentary Service Commission, 2017).

Empowering Marginalized Communities

Marginalized communities such as women, and people living with disabilities among other groups have had their interests promoted, and even have the ability to manage their affairs as provided for in Article 91 of the Kenyan constitution (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). This allows them to participate in local governance, and have their needs attended to.

Promotion of Accountability

Hope (2014) suggests that devotion has promoted accountability and transparency through inclusivity in decision-making. He further adds that it is easier to track transparency in services offered by devolved units of governments, with the new 2010 constitution establishing various processes and avenues that are used by the people to make their leaders accountable (Constitution of Kenya, 2010).

Summary and Conclusion

The impact and significance of devolution in Kenya cannot be overstated, with benefits being observed a decade since its adoption in the country. Devolution has allowed the inclusion of marginalized communities, led to more efficient service delivery to citizens, promoted national cohesion, allowed more transparency in governance, and significantly improved civic participation, which has all led to improved quality of life in the country (TISA, 2011). Challenges have risen out of the devolved systems, and the country must continue to address these challenges to ensure that devolution has a net positive impact on governance.

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